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## **A STUDY OF SELF PERCEPTION AMONG HOMOSEXUAL AND HETROSEXUAL ADULTS**

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### **ABSTRACT**

*Psychology has long recognized that people must know themselves in order to survive and adapt in life. Homosexuals often have difficulty in accepting themselves due to their sexual orientation and in turn it hampers their social interaction also making it a cyclical process. **Objective:** The present research was undertaken to study the self-perception between the homosexual and heterosexual individuals. **Method:** The total sample was of 80 participants comprising of 40 homosexual and 40 heterosexual individuals. Purposive sampling technique along with snowball technique was used to collect the sample. Self-Perception Scale by KG Agrawal was used as a tool to measure self-perception. To analyze and interpret the data, mean, standard deviation and T- test were used. **Results:** The results of the present study indicate that there exists a significant difference with regard to the feeling of self-perception between the homosexual and heterosexual individuals. Also with regard to their self-acceptance, there exist significant differences between the homosexual and heterosexual individuals, whereas there is no significant difference between the homosexual and heterosexual individuals with respect to their self-regard.*

**Key words:** Homosexual, Heterosexual, Self-Perception, Self-Regard, Self-Acceptance

### **INTRODUCTION**

Homosexual people often face adverse environmental reactions due to their "sexual minority status" (Garofalo et al., 1998). Sexual minority status is a phenomenon that includes several elements: sexual attraction (the sex to which one is attracted), behaviour (the gender of one's sexual partners) and identity (the label attributed to oneself) (Savin-Williams & Diamond, 2000). While there are a number of categories within each element, the present work will concentrate on self-perception within that element, gay and lesbian youth.

## **Self-Perception**

Psychology has long acknowledged that people need to know themselves in order to function and adapt in life. The importance of self-knowledge derives from the fact that self is the only constant in life. Because of this, if the concept of self is well developed, it can provide a strong base of beliefs, desires, and attitudes to navigate the many decisions of everyday life.

According to APA, "A person's view of his or her self or of any of the mental or physical attributes that constitute the self. Such a view may involve genuine self-knowledge or varying degrees of distortion. Also called self-percept." Self-perceptions, or various assumptions that we have about ourselves, have a strong effect on the kinds of activities that we partake in, the amount of commitment that we can make to that activity, and the probability that we will engage in that activity in the future. Understanding how self-perceptions affect behavioural outcomes and eventually lead to healthy adolescent development has been a long-standing goal for researchers.

## **Self Perception among Gay and Lesbian Individuals**

While self-concept is generally described as a set of self-awareness beliefs (Campbell, 1990), specific definitions of self-concept can vary between authors. Bentall et al. (2001) coherently analysed the widely used self-concept terminology, defining five domains that are commonly used to describe self-concept:

- self-esteem
- self-consciousness
- self-representations
- self-schemas
- self-perception

Adolescent development for homosexual individuals can feel much more challenging, as they still need to experience a phase of developing a positive self-concept in a predominantly heterosexual social setting (Rotheram-Borus et al., 1995). Each of the five areas listed above is believed to have an effect on sexual minority youth, both internally and externally. Higgins' (1987) theory of self-discrepancy allows one to conceptualise the tensions of LGBT (lesbian, homosexual, bisexual, and

transgender) self-concept in a heteronormative framework. Self-discrepancy theory suggests that individuals strive to reach a position where their self-concept is in line with their socially learned values and beliefs. According to the theory of self-discrepancy, if these conditions are not met, an individual would be prone to feelings of fear, shame, rejection and guilt, and a high degree of self-discrepancy will lead to a low self-esteem and a negative self-concept.

Although extensive studies have focused on understanding how self-concept evolves and how it affects young people, the emerging line of studies has begun to focus on identifying the direction and nature of the relationship between positive and negative perceptions about self and others and the social context, focusing especially on gay and lesbian youth (Vincke & van Heeringen, 2002; Snapp et al. For example, Vincke and van Heeringen (2002) analysed a group of 197 gay and lesbian youth in a longitudinal study and found that when their environment, such as family and peers, are aware of their sexual orientation and are supportive and nurturing, gay and lesbian youth scored higher on self-concept measures. These findings are supported by Snapp et al. (2015) who observed 245 LGBT youth and confirmed that a positive and supportive atmosphere (such as family, peers, and community) has been correlated with higher self-esteem in youth ( $r=0.37$ ) and a more positive attitude towards their sexual identities ( $r=0.36$ ). The results of both studies were confirmed by recent findings by Wilkerson et al. (2017) who analysed a sample of 108 sexual minority youth and identified a correlation between a positive social atmosphere (such as family, peers, and LGBT youth organisations) and youth self-esteem ( $\beta = 0.72$ , 95% CI [0.38, 1.06]).

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

Mohr and Fassinger conducted a study titled, "Self-acceptance and self-disclosure of sexual orientation in lesbian, gay, and bisexual adults: An attachment perspective", linking attachment variables to self-acceptance and self-disclosure of sexual orientation was tested using data from 489 lesbian, gay, and bisexual (LGB) adults. The model comprises the following four variable domains: (a) representations of childhood attachment interactions with parents; (b) expectations of parental acceptance for sexual orientation; (c) general attachment work model; and (d) LGB variables. Generally, the findings supported the proposed model. For example, attachment avoidance and anxiety were associated with self-acceptance difficulties, and avoidance was associated with low levels of disclosure in daily life. Parental bond had an indirect impact on

identity and disclosure through its interaction with parental LGB help and general attachment. Some results differed depending on the gender and parent religious affiliation of the participants.

Feinstein, Davila, & Yoneda in a study, "Self-concept and self-stigma in lesbians and gay men" explored the connections between three facets of self-concept (self-esteem, self-concept clarity and sexual identity confusion), self-stigma and depressive symptoms. Two hundred and eighty-eight participants (163 lesbians and 125 gay men) completed an anonymous online survey. Results indicated that individuals with lower self-esteem, lower self-concept clarity and higher sexual identity confusion reported higher self-stigma. Furthermore, the negative correlation between self-concept clarity and self-stigma was important for individuals with lower self-esteem, but not for those with higher self-esteem. Finally, the positive correlation between self-stigma and depressive symptoms was important for people with lower self-esteem, but not those with higher self-esteem, and was greater for those with lower sexual identity confusion. Current studies demonstrate the role of self-concept in the internalisation and sequelae of sexual stigma.

Hossain & Ferreira did a study, "Impact of Social Context on the Self-Concept of Gay and Lesbian Youth: A Systematic Review" stating that self-concept distortion has been widely associated with diminished mental health among gay and lesbian youth. It has been suggested that the social context can have a moderating impact on the creation of a healthy self-concept. However, there has been no high quality analysis of these definitions with respect to LGBT youth. A comprehensive study of the relationship between the social context and the self-concept in gay and lesbian youth was conducted. Twenty reports have been included in the study. The results indicate that the social context has a major impact on the development of self-concept. Differences in evaluation processes, areas of the social context studied, and the one-dimensional aspect of the analysis of self-concept interfere with the drawing of explicit conclusions about the relationship between the social context and self-concept.

## **OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY**

To study and compare the self-perception between the homosexual and heterosexual individuals with respect to self-regard and self-acceptance.

## **HYPOTHESES**

There will be significant difference in the self-acceptance between the homosexual and heterosexual individuals with regards to their self-perception.

There will be significant difference in the self-regard between the homosexual and heterosexual individuals with regards to their self-perception.

There will be significant difference in the overall self-perception between the homosexual and heterosexual individuals.

## **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

Keeping in view the nature of the present study, a descriptive survey method was used.

### **Sample**

The aim of the present study was to investigate the self-perception between the homosexual and heterosexual individual with respect to self-regard and self-acceptance. In the present research, the researcher approached 40 homosexual and 40 heterosexual individuals for the collection of data. The sample collected via purposive sampling and snowball technique.

### **Variables**

In the present research, variables have been classified as under:-

- **Independent Variable**

Sexual Preference: Homosexual and Hetrosexual

- **Dependent Variable**

Scores on Self Perception scale

### **Inclusion Criteria**

1. Only individuals in the age range of 20 – 50 years were selected as a sample for the present study.
2. Equal number of homosexual and heterosexual subjects were selected.
3. Subjects knowing basic hindi to understand and respond to the questionnaires were included.

### Tools Used

In the present study Self Perception Scale by KG Agrawal was used to access the self-perception of among homosexual and heterosexual individuals.

### Statistical Tools Used

To analyze and interpret the data, the investigator used mean, standard deviation and T- test as statistical techniques.

### RESULTS

Table 1: Shows the mean, standard deviation and t-ratio for testing and comparing the feeling of self-regard among homosexual and heterosexual individuals with regard to their self-perception

<b>Sexual Preference</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Std. Deviation</b>	<b>t-value</b>	<b>Level of Significance</b>
Homosexual	40	20.95	2.05	0.91	N.S
Hetrosexual	40	21.33	1.63		

Table 2: Shows the mean, standard deviation and t-ratio for testing and comparing the feeling of self-acceptance among homosexual and heterosexual individuals with regard to their self-perception

<b>Sexual Preference</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Std. Deviation</b>	<b>t-value</b>	<b>Level of Significance</b>
Homosexual	40	18.28	3.71	4.76	0.01
Hetrosexual	40	21.33	1.63		

Table 3: Shows the mean, standard deviation and t-ratio for testing and comparing the overall self-perception among homosexual and heterosexual individuals

<b>Sexual Preference</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Std. Deviation</b>	<b>t-value</b>	<b>Level of Significance</b>
Homosexual	40	18.28	3.71	3.99	0.01
Hetrosexual	40	20.95	2.05		

## **DISCUSSION**

In table-1 we see that there is no significant difference in the level of feelings of self-regard between homosexual and heterosexual adults. Self-regard is how much one values oneself. A number of factors can impact self-regard, including how we compare ourselves to others and how others respond to us. The results show that homosexuals have similar understanding as heterosexuals about their self-worth and they do not undervalue their lives despite the social stigma attached to their sexual orientation. Though results of the Study "Self-concept and self-stigma in lesbians and gay men" by Feinstein, Davila, & Yoneda had indicated that individuals with lower self-esteem, lower self-concept clarity and higher sexual identity confusion reported higher self-stigma. Here we see that there is no problem amongst homosexuals with self-regard and it is at a non-significant level.

In table-2 we see that there is 0.01 level of significance regarding self-acceptance with regard to their self-perception, among homosexual adults.

According to a theory known as social identity theory, self-concept is composed of two key parts: personal identity and social identity.

Psychologist, Carl Rogers believed that there were three different parts of self-concept: self-image, self-esteem and ideal self.

Psychologist Dr. Bruce A. Bracken suggested in 1992 that there are six specific domains related to self-concept: social, physical, family, academic, affect (emotional) and competence.

If self-concept is aligned with reality self-acceptance is high and if it is not aligned with reality then self-acceptance is low. Here we see a significant difference in self-acceptance because we know for fact that self-concept is not in congruence with social reality as far as the identity of homosexuals is concerned.

As stated earlier in this paper that homosexual youth often face adverse reactions from their environment due to their “sexual minority status” (Garofalo et al., 1998). In table-3 the results show a 0.01 level of significance in the level of self-perception among homosexual adults.

The results of the 2006 World Value Survey, suggested that self-perception among Gay and lesbians could be low because 64% Indians said that they believed homosexuality is never justified, while only 14% said that it is sometimes or always justified. We know that self-perception is a term understood through variables like individual's cognition, emotional well-being, self-esteem and indices of lived experience. Self-perception is an individual's understanding of the self through the lens of the society and culture which one inhabits.

Social support satisfaction is associated with lower risk of anxiety, depression, and suicidal ideation. Higher self-esteem is associated with lower risk for depression and suicide. Resilient coping and social support have shown varied protective benefits for MSM and transwomen. Joanna Almeida, Renee M Johnson, Heather L Corliss, Beth E Molnar, Deborah Azrael studied "Emotional distress among LGBT youth: The influence of perceived discrimination based on sexual orientation," and found that LGBT youth scored significantly higher on the scale of depressive symptomatology. They were also more likely than heterosexual, non-transgendered youth to report suicidal ideation (30% vs. 6%,  $p < 0.0001$ ) and self-harm (21% vs. 6%,  $p < 0.0001$ ). Mediation analyses showed that perceived discrimination accounted for increased

depressive symptomatology among LGBT males and females, and accounted for an elevated risk of self-harm and suicidal ideation among LGBT males. Perceived discrimination is a likely contributor to emotional distress among LGBT youth. Thus, we see that social perception of a particular class/group (LGBT) influences their self-perception and this sense of otherness or social unacceptance leads to poor/negative self-perception. Hence a significant difference is visible in the feelings of self-perception among the homosexual adults.

## **CONCLUSION**

Adolescence is a period of development, during which the youth explore their personal identities and begin to act according to gender roles acceptable by societal structures around them (Rotheram-Borus et al., 1995). During this time of development, homosexual individuals also have to come to terms with their sexual identities and examine what their sexual orientation means in relation to their personal identities (Rotheram-Borus et al., 1995). This formation and preservation of a healthy self-concept along with accepting one's belonging to such categories may present to be problematic. Research has illustrated (e.g., Silverschanz et al., 2008; Woodford et al., 2012; Woodford et al., 2014) the significance of social context in providing a supportive background to overcoming hurdles and helping adjustments in the development of self-concept.

Historically, the silencing of LGBT community without adequate social or material support has isolated them from both the normal population and agencies serving those communities.

DJ Bem's (1972) self-perception theory for reducing heterosocial anxiety in college males in Real life," pleasant, prearranged social interactions with females produced a highly significant change in self-perceptions concerning anxiety as measured by the Fear of Negative Evaluation Questionnaire, the Social Avoidance and Distress Scale, the Security–Insecurity Inventory, and the State-Trait Anxiety Inventory. Similarly, if pleasant social interaction of homosexuals with heterosexual is encouraged and arranged, it could improve the self-perception of homosexuals.

Historically, students who are lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgendered (LGBT) report higher rates of social stress, depression, and anxiety, and reported discrimination and poorer access to employment facility, health care and housing.

We know that stigma, prejudice, and discrimination create a hostile and stressful social environment that leads to negative self-perception, maladjustment and causes mental health problems. It is time that this kind of negative categorization of people based on their sexual orientation be discouraged so that the LGBT community could lead a life of dignity.

Although the debate on classification of homosexuality as a mental disorder ended in 1973 with the removal of homosexuality from the second edition of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM; American Psychiatric Association, 1973), its heritage has lasted. In a society like ours where homosexuals are uniformly treated with disparagement or contempt—to say nothing about outright hostility—it would be surprising indeed if substantial numbers of them did not suffer from an inferior self-concept and some extent of sadness or dejection with their disgraceful status. Social stress might therefore be expected to have a strong impact in the lives of people belonging to stigmatized social categories.

However, acceptance of Homosexuals is still far away, as more recent studies findings reveal ambivalent and negative attitudes toward homosexuality amongst most heterosexual people and the presence of a number of harmful prejudices.

Targeted interventions through scientific research studies, legal protection, positive media projections about the LGBT community may bring about change in attitude towards them from the heterosexual population. Once social acceptance is given then possibly self-perception will also improve as they will no more be treated as 'other' or social outcasts.

## **SUGGESTIONS**

Positivity of the social context does not decisively lead to positive self-concept formation, nor does the negative context predetermine self-concept distortions. What is necessary is developing the resilience factors of gay and lesbian youth, making their families understand the issue at hand , providing community services and educational opportunities and using accessible employment and legal avenues that can reduce the strength of overt and covert heterosexism that hinders the construction of positive self-concept. Further longitudinal and cross-cultural studies would be required to provide insight into the dynamics of associations.

The first roadblock in building a positive self-perception of LGBT community was removed when the Supreme Court decriminalized section 377 on 6th September 2018, but the final victory will come when the government will extend the same civil rights to the LGBT population that the straight population enjoys.

Now the state should begin to recognize non-heterosexual unions, address the issues of homelessness, bullying, violence, workplace discrimination still being faced by the members of the LGBTQ community and give support to LGBT population drowning in mental health conditions, due to negative self-perception and discrimination by the society.

We should now also address the discrimination and unfair treatment which blatantly exists in society's mindset towards homosexual community whether it is in terms of inheritance laws or surrogacy laws.

NGOs and government agencies should work together to create awareness about the equal rights and dignity of LGBT population so that they are absorbed in the mainstream of society and they can contribute to the task of nation building.

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